Steve ★ Rogers

CAPTAIN AMERICA®

SPENCER • PINA • GUINALDO • ROSENBERG

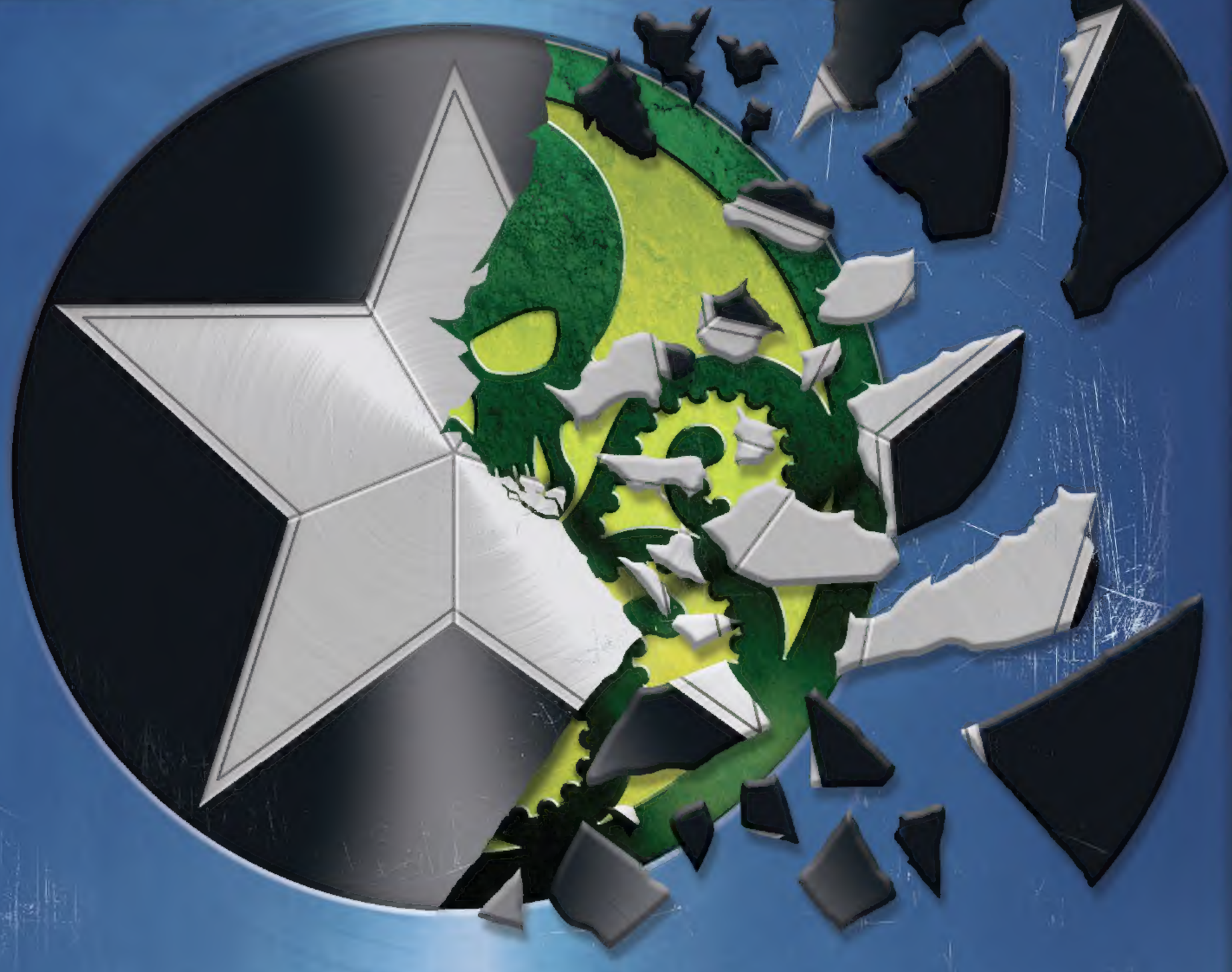
MARVEL

#9

THE TRIAL OF MARIA HILL!

Super-Soldier. Avenger. Agent of Hydra. He is...

Steve ★ Rogers
CAPTAIN AMERICA



Steve Rogers' reality has been secretly rewritten by Kobik, a sentient Cosmic Cube acting under the influence of the Red Skull. In Steve's new history, a Hydra agent named Elisa Sinclair enrolled Steve in a school where he trained to be a Hydra soldier and met his best friend, Helmut Zemo. Now, Captain America is completely dedicated to Hydra's ideals and is plotting in secret to spread them throughout the world.

Meanwhile, S.H.I.E.L.D. Director Maria Hill is facing a tribunal to determine whether her numerous controversial decisions--including her use of a Cosmic Cube to imprison and reform super villains at Pleasant Hill--will affect the future of her career.

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THE KEEP.
1940.

WE ALL FACE JUDGMENT SOMEDAY.

ALL YOU CAN DO IS TRY TO BE READY.

TRY TO WORK HARD AND DO WHAT'S RIGHT--

--THAT WAY, WHEN YOUR TURN COMES--

--YOU CAN STAND TALL.

"MY DECISION IS *FINAL*, DOCTOR FENHOFF--"

YOU CANNOT BE SERIOUS, DANIEL--***LOOK AT HIM!***

I AM. OR AT LEAST, I ***THINK*** I AM. HE'S THE ONE THAT'S HALF THE SIZE OF THE OTHERS AND COVERED IN MUD, YES?

PRECISELY MY POINT--

--YOU KNOW I HAVE GROWN TO SEE THE MERIT IN YOUNG STEVEN ROGERS--

I AM PERFECTLY WILLING TO ADMIT I WAS WRONG. HE IS CERTAINLY A BRILLIANT AND DEDICATED STUDENT--

AND WHAT A CHANGE IT'S BEEN. NOT SO MANY YEARS AGO YOU WERE TELLING ME WE SHOULD PUT HIM DOWN.

BUT A FIELD DUTY ASSIGNMENT? HE'S TOO WEAK, TOO ***SICKLY!*** LOOK AT HIM OUT ON THE COURSE--HE'S FALLING ON HIS FACE IN EACH AND EVERY CHALLENGE!

HM. AND YET I CAN'T HELP BUT NOTICE--

"--HE KEEPS GETTING BACK UP."

THIS MISSION IS TOO ***IMPORTANT***--IT CANNOT BE ENTRUSTED TO THAT BOY. HE IS SIMPLY NOT UP TO THE TASK.

ON THE CONTRARY, DOCTOR FENHOFF. THAT'S EXACTLY WHY IT MUST BE HIM.

THIS IS WHAT HE WAS MEANT TO DO.

NOW.

IS IT READY?

IT REALLY *ISN'T.*

WE KEEP TELLING YOU THAT.

I KNOW. THAT'S WHY I KEEP ASKING.

LOOK, THE SCIENCE IS SOUND. A LITTLE ON THE *DATED* SIDE, BUT--

THE IMPLEMENTATION OF IT--IT'S ***MIND-BOGGLING.*** YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT ONE OF THE BIGGEST UNDER-TAKINGS SINCE THE ***MOON LANDING***. THE SCALE ALONE--

I'M NOT PAYING YOU GUYS TO BE PRACTICAL. I'M PAYING FOR YOU TO WOW ME. WHEN YOU BROUGHT THIS TO ME, I WAS WOWED. NOW I'M ANNOYED. MILDLY.

WE DID WHAT YOU ***TOLD*** US TO DO, DIRECTOR HILL--WE WENT THROUGH ALL THE RED FILE PROPOSALS. YOU ASKED TO FIND YOU SOMETHING ***BIG.*** SO WE ***DID.***

WE'RE JUST SAYING--IT MIGHT BE A LITTLE ***TOO*** BIG.

THAT'S WHAT SHE--YOU KNOW WHAT, I'M NOT GONNA WASTE IT ON YOU GUYS. YOU DON'T DESERVE IT. HERE'S WHAT WE'RE GONNA DO--

YOU ARE GONNA POLISH THIS UP AND MAKE IT PRESENTABLE. I WANT THE POWERPOINT TO END ALL POWERPOINTS. AND AFTER THAT--***ONLY*** AFTER THAT--WILL WE DISCUSS HOW MUCH IT COSTS, OR HOW MUCH TIME IT WILL TAKE TO BUILD--UNDERSTOOD?

I DID NOT GET WHERE I AM BY HEDGING MY BETS, AND I AM DAMN SURE NOT GONNA LOSE EVERYTHING BY PLAYING IT SAFE.

THIS IS GONNA BE ***AMAZING.***

THIS IS GONNA BE A *DISASTER.*

IF OUR FUTURE IS TO BE SECURE--

HEY, IS THAT *PESSIMISM?* I'M NOT ENTERTAINING PESSIMISM IN MY CONFERENCE ROOM.

SHE'S KINDA RIGHT, THOUGH, EVERETT--

THIS WAS SUPPOSED TO BE *EASY!*

IT WAS *NEVER* GONNA BE EASY.

YEAH, BUT COME ON--IT'S *MARIA HILL--* SHE'S, LIKE, THE MOST HATED WOMAN ON THE PLANET RIGHT NOW--

AND WE HAVE THROWN *EVERYTHING* AT HER. THE ENTIRE *BOOK*. HOW DOES SHE KEEP BOUNCING BACK FROM THIS STUFF?

I NEED TO KEEP PRACTICING.

IF OUR FUTURE IS TO BE SECURE--

WHERE DID IT ALL GO WRONG?

DAYS EARLIER.
S.H.I.E.L.D. HELICARRIER ILIAD.
THE TRIAL OF MARIA HILL.

LET'S BEGIN.

THIS TRIBUNAL OF THE WORLD SECURITY COUNCIL HAS CONVENED TO FORMALLY REVIEW THE PERFORMANCE OF S.H.I.E.L.D. DIRECTOR OF OPERATIONS MARIA HILL, AND TO DETERMINE WHETHER OR NOT SHE REMAINS FIT TO SERVE IN SUCH A CAPACITY.

SPEAKING ON BEHALF OF THE PUBLIC ACCOUNTABILITY OFFICE WILL BE EVERETT K. ROSS--

THANK YOU, COUNCIL-MEMBER--

AND YOU, DIRECTOR HILL, HAVE CHOSEN TO SPEAK ON YOUR OWN BEHALF?

OH YES, SIR, COUNCIL-MEMBER RENDELL--

--I AM *VERY* MUCH LOOKING FORWARD TO IT.

THE SCOTTISH HIGHLANDS.

SEEMS LIKE THESE JOKERS KEEP COMING--ARE THEY MAKING **COPIES** OF THEMSELVES? IS THAT A SPELL THEY CAN DO?

UNION JACK'S RIGHT, SHARON--WE COULD USE A LITTLE MORE **INTEL** ON HOW TO DEAL WITH THESE GUYS--

APOLOGIES, STEVE--

--WHAT WE HAVE ON THEM IS PRETTY **SLIM.** THE **CULT OF THE DARKHOLD** IS A LITTLE OUTSIDE OUR USUAL FOCUS AREA.

YES, AND AGAIN, CAPTAIN--ALL OF US AT DOWNING STREET CERTAINLY APPRECIATE YOUR AND S.H.I.E.L.D.'S ASSISTANCE WITH THIS MISSION.

HAPPY TO HELP, MINISTER DALTON. JUST WISH I WAS DOING A BETTER--*UNFF*-- JOB OF IT.

HE'S BEING MODEST, ALL. I'M STRUGGLING TO KEEP UP!

WELL, ALL THAT MATTERS IS WHAT SHOULD BE IN **RANGE**--

--STEVE, DO YOU HAVE **VISUAL** ON THE OBJECTIVE?

WELL... IF I--*UNFF*-- SQUINT.

BUT FIRST WE HAVE TO DEAL WITH THESE--

NO--GO, CAP! I CAN HOLD THESE THINGS OFF--

THANKS, JOE--

--I WON'T BE LONG.

I'VE TRIED TO LIVE A LIFE THAT'S READY FOR JUDGMENT DAY--

OOF!

--EVEN IF SOMETIMES I'VE COME UP SHORT.

THE MOST IMPORTANT THING IS TO ENDURE.

TO KEEP STRIVING, KEEP DIGGING DEEPER--

--NO MATTER WHAT YOU MAY FIND THERE.

1940.

AGH!

STOP CRYING-- YOU WANT IT TO BECOME INFECTED? YOU THINK YOU'LL DO BETTER ON THE COURSE WITH ONE ARM?

I EMBARRASSED MYSELF OUT THERE, HELMUT. AND EVEN WORSE, I KNOW MR. WHITEHALL AND DR. FENHOFF SAW IT!

ALL THIS SULKING. WHAT DO YOU CARE? YOU'RE ALREADY THE TEACHER'S PET. YOU KNOW THEY BOTH GO ON ABOUT WHAT A BRILLIANT STUDENT YOU ARE. "WHY CAN'T YOU BE MORE LIKE STEVEN?" THEY SAY. IT'S WHY WE ALL HATE YOU. SO RELAX--

--NO MATTER WHAT YOU DO, YOU'LL UNDOUBTEDLY BE GIVEN SOME CUSHY OFFICER POSITION PLANNING OUR EVERY MOVE RIGHT ALONGSIDE THEM--

BUT I DON'T WANT THAT! I WANT TO BE OUT IN THE FIELD, HELPING US WIN THIS WAR!

-SIGH-

IT DOESN'T MATTER, STEVEN. NO MATTER WHAT PATH YOU TAKE, YOU WILL DO ALL THAT AND MORE. DO YOU NOT REMEMBER WHAT THE WITCH SAID ALL THOSE YEARS AGO?

YEAH, YEAH...

BECAUSE I HAVE NEVER FORGOTTEN. ONE WAY OR ANOTHER--

--YOU'RE THE ONE THAT'S GOING TO LEAD US ALL.

NOW.

THE PROBLEM IS THE WITNESS LIST--

WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT? WE HAD ***GREAT*** WITNESSES...

--A PATTERN OF RECKLESS BEHAVIOR, TOO MANY UNSANCTIONED OPERATIONS TO COUNT. IN MY FORTY YEARS IN THE MILITARY, I ***NEVER*** SAW SUCH DISREGARD FOR AUTHORITY--

THE ***REGISTRATION ACT*** WILL FOREVER BE VIEWED AS A STAIN ON S.H.I.E.L.D.'S HISTORY. AND DIRECTOR HILL'S CAMPAIGN OF BLACKMAIL, INTIMIDATION AND COERCION DURING THAT PERIOD WEAKENED THE ORGANIZATION'S STANDING WITH ITS ALLIES AND THE WORLD.

THE SCIENCE BEHIND PLEASANT HILL WAS SIMPLY ABHORRENT-- REWRITING THE REALITY OF THESE PRISONERS IN A CLEAR VIOLATION OF ***HUMAN RIGHTS*** AND ***INTER-NATIONAL LAW***--

WE HAD ***EXPERT WITNESSES.*** SHE HAD...***HUMAN BEINGS.***

SHE SAVED MY LIFE. AND MY ***BROTHER'S*** LIFE.

HELL, MAYBE THEY SAY WHAT SHE DID WAS RECKLESS, BUT IF S.H.I.E.L.D. HADN'T SHOWN UP THAT DAY, I'D BE MISSING A LOT MORE THAN THE ***ARM.*** I'D BE MISSING MY SON BEING BORN.

WHAT MARIA HILL DID IN REGARDS TO THE REGISTRATION ACT, SHE DID FOR ALL THE MOTHERS LIKE ME--THE ONES WHO LOST THEIR CHILDREN IN STAMFORD THAT DAY. IF YOU ASK ME, SHE DESERVES A MEDAL.

OKAY, YES-- THOSE WERE SOME DECENT PLAYS ON HER PART--

WE DIDN'T EVEN MENTION THE BEST ONE!

STATE YOUR NAME, PLEASE.

UH...SLYDE? IS IT OKAY TO STICK WITH THAT?

I WAS, *UH*, ONE OF THOSE PRISONERS AT PLEASANT HILL. WHEN THEY STRAPPED ME INTO THAT CHAIR AND BROUGHT THE CREEPY LITTLE KID IN TO "MAKE ME MY BEST SELF" OR WHATEVER, I WAS TERRIFIED-- SCREAMING, OUTTA MY MIND--

--BUT THEN THE CRAZIEST THING HAPPENED--

"--I GOT A NEW LIFE... AND I ***LOVED*** IT.

"I DIDN'T WANT TO STEAL ANYMORE, I DIDN'T WANNA HURT ANYBODY. I JUST WANTED TO BE--I DUNNO--***DECENT.***"

AND WHEN I GOT WOKEN UP FROM ALL THAT-- WHEN MY ***REALITY*** GOT RESTORED OR WHATEVER-- GUESS WHAT? THAT STUCK.

I DIDN'T WANT TO GO BACK TO THE WAY THINGS USED TO BE. I WAS ***CHANGED***. SINCE THEN, I'VE BEEN TRYING TO USE MY SKILLS FOR GOOD, I GUESS--I'M STILL LEARNING, STILL TRYING, BUT--

--WHEN I HEAR YOU GUYS TALKING ABOUT HOW AWFUL IT WAS, WHAT THEY DID TO ME, ALL I CAN THINK IS, ARE YOU KIDDING? THIS IS THE BEST THING THAT EVER HAPPENED TO ME--

--AND I OWE IT ALL TO THAT LADY THERE.

YES, FINE, THAT WAS BAD. BUT YOU'RE FORGETTING--

"WE HAD THE BEST WITNESS OF THEM ALL."

I'VE KNOWN MARIA HILL FOR SOME TIME NOW. I BELIEVE SHE IS A ***PATRIOT,*** AND THAT SHE HAS SERVED THIS ORGANIZATION WITH PASSION AND UNPARALLELED COMMITMENT.

AND I DON'T LIKE TO INTERFERE IN THINGS IF I DON'T HAVE TO--I THINK ALL OF YOU KNOW THAT ABOUT ME.

BUT SOMEWHERE ALONG THE WAY--LINES STARTED TO GET CROSSED. LINES YOU CAN'T COME BACK FROM. MAYBE IT STARTED WITH THE FIRST ***CIVIL WAR***--I'M NOT SURE I'M IMPARTIAL ENOUGH TO CLAIM THAT--

--BUT I DO KNOW WHERE I DECIDED IT HAD TO END.

HER RECKLESS BEHAVIOR AND CAVALIER DISREGARD FOR OUR CORE, SHARED VALUES IN THE PLEASANT HILL DEBACLE--THAT WAS THE MOMENT. AND IT NEARLY RESULTED IN A MADMAN LIKE ***BARON ZEMO*** GETTING HIS HANDS ON A ***COSMIC CUBE.*** THAT'S A SIN THAT ***CANNOT*** BE FORGIVEN.

YOU ***FAILED*** US ALL THAT DAY, MARIA.

LOOK, IT'S VERY LIKELY THIS ORGANIZATION'S POWERS WILL INCREASE DRAMATICALLY IF THE U.S. CONGRESS PASSES THE ***S.H.I.E.L.D. ACT.*** THAT MEANS WHOEVER IS IN CHARGE HERE WILL BE TASKED WITH WIELDING THIS NEW AUTHORITY JUDICIOUSLY.

I NO LONGER BELIEVE MARIA HILL CAN BE THAT PERSON--SHE SIMPLY LACKS THE JUDGMENT TO DO SO. AND SO--RELUCTANTLY--I DO NOT THINK SHE SHOULD REMAIN IN THE DIRECTOR'S CHAIR--

--ESPECIALLY NOT WHEN WE HAVE ***BETTER*** CHOICES TO LEAD US.

SO YEAH, NOBODY PANIC. CAPTAIN AMERICA'S WORDS CARRY MORE WEIGHT THAN ANYTHING ELSE WE COULD SAY OR DO.

AND REMEMBER--THE VOTE COUNT SHOWS US AHEAD, COMFORTABLY. WE JUST NEED TO FOCUS ON CLOSING THOSE DEALS...

NOW, I WILL ADMIT--

--SOMETIMES THE WAY I LIVE ISN'T EASY.

PLENTY OF CHALLENGES COME UP ALONG THE WAY.

THESE ARE THE THINGS THAT TEST YOU--

--AND YOU HAVE TO LEARN HOW TO USE THEM TO YOUR ADVANTAGE. BECAUSE IN THE END--

--THE PERSON WHO WILL JUDGE YOU THE MOST HARSHLY IS ALWAYS YOURSELF.

YOU'RE THE ONLY ONE WHO WILL EVER TRULY KNOW WHAT YOU ARE MADE OF.

SO YOU HOLD YOURSELF TO THE HIGHEST STANDARD YOU CAN IMAGINE--

--YOU REACH FARTHER THAN YOU CAN GRASP--

--AND HOPE THAT YOU COME OUT AHEAD IN THE END. THAT'S ALL YOU CAN DO--

--ALL YOU CAN HOPE FOR.

IF OUR FUTURE IS TO BE SECURE--

--WE MUST ANSWER FOR THE CRIMES OF TODAY.

THANK YOU, MISTER ROSS. DIRECTOR HILL--YOUR CLOSING STATEMENT?

WITH PLEASURE, CHAIRMAN RENDELL--

WOW, THAT WAS ***A LOT,*** RIGHT? I MEAN, EVEN ***I'M*** MAD AT ME.

AND IT'S HARD TO ARGUE SOME OF THIS STUFF. MADRIPOOR, LATVERIA, THE CIVIL WAR, PLEASANT HILL--TURNS OUT QUAGMIRE'S NOT JUST A *FAMILY GUY* CHARACTER AFTER ALL.

AND LOOK, I KNEW WHEN I TOOK THIS JOB THAT IT WOULD BE MORE ***LOSSES*** THAN WINS. THAT I WAS SIGNING ON TO BE EVERYONE'S MOST HATED SPYMASTER.

NICK FURY GOT THROUGH IT WITH A LOT OF STIFF DRINKS AND GRUFF SPEECHES. I HAVE *BATTLESHIP* ON MY PHONE. WE ALL PROCESS THESE THINGS IN DIFFERENT WAYS. BUT ANYHOO--

--I NOTICE MR. ROSS TALKED A LOT ABOUT THE ***FUTURE*** IN HIS CLOSING, WHICH IS WEIRD, BECAUSE HIS WHOLE CASE IS ABOUT THE ***PAST***. GENOCIDE THIS, TORTURE THAT. I FEEL LIKE I'M STUCK IN THE WORLD'S LONGEST RUNNING FLASHBACK EPISODE.

WHICH IS A SHAME--BECAUSE WE ***SHOULD*** TALK ABOUT THE FUTURE. WE REALLY, REALLY SHOULD.

SEE, I'M NOT INTERESTED IN TRYING TO EXPLAIN MY PAST ACTIONS, AND I'M CERTAINLY NOT GOING TO ***APOLOGIZE*** FOR THE THINGS I'VE DONE. EVERY ORDER I EVER GAVE, I DID WITH ONE AIM IN MIND--KEEPING THIS WORLD ***SAFE.***

AND I'M ALSO NOT GOING TO INSULT YOU BY TELLING YOU "I'LL TRY TO DO BETTER" OR MAKE SOME EMPTY PROMISES ABOUT REFORMS AND COMPROMISES AND SURVEY-MONKEY RESULTS. INSTEAD--

--I'M JUST GOING TO ***SHOW*** YOU WHAT THE FUTURE LOOKS LIKE.

FOR AS LONG AS I'VE BEEN IN THIS CHAIR--AND WELL BEFORE THAT, EVEN--THIS LITTLE PLANET OF OURS HAS BEEN UNDER ATTACK.

THE KREE. THE SKRULLS. THE CELESTIALS. GALACTUS.

HELL, THIS LAST CIVIL WAR STARTED BECAUSE THANOS JUST SHOWED UP OUT OF NOWHERE LOOKING FOR A ***COSMIC CUBE--OUR*** COSMIC CUBE!

"AND NOW CAPTAIN MARVEL AND ALPHA FLIGHT ARE WARNING US OF AN INCOMING INVASION FORCE, A RACE CALLED THE ***CHITAURI.***

"APPARENTLY THEY'RE EVEN BIGGER IN NUMBER THAN THE ANNIHILATION WAVE."

EVERY SINGLE TIME THIS HAPPENS, WE TELL OURSELVES: NEVER AGAIN. THAT WE'LL BE READY. UNTIL THE NEXT TIME, WHEN WE'RE NOT. WELL, I'VE HAD ENOUGH.

SO I GAVE OUR SMART GUYS A SIMPLE ORDER: ***FIX IT.*** GO THROUGH EVERY PROJECT PROPOSAL, EVERY ASSET, FIND ME SOMETHING TO SHIFT THE PARADIGM. SOMETHING, ***ANYTHING,*** TO MAKE US A LESS ATTRACTIVE PIT STOP FOR ANTLER-HEADED PLANET EATERS EVERYWHERE.

AND YOU KNOW WHAT? FOR UNDERFUNDED NERDS, THEY REALLY CAME THROUGH THIS TIME. LADIES AND GENTLEMEN OF THE WORLD SECURITY COUNCIL, I BRING YOU--

--THE ***PLANETARY DEFENSE SHIELD.*** OR AS I CALL IT--

--THE ***SHIELD.***

A TRULY IMPENETRABLE ***FORCE FIELD*** SURROUNDING THE ENTIRE PLANET--A WALL, A BARRIER, A FENCE--WHATEVER YOU WANT TO CALL IT, IT'S THE DIVIDING LINE BETWEEN ***US*** AND ***THEM.***

AND IT WILL HOLD. THIS IS THE STRONGEST PROTECTIVE SHIELDING EVER INVENTED. WE'VE TESTED THE METRICS AGAINST THE BEST--SUE RICHARDS, MAGNETO, GRAVITON--AND THIS IS MORE POWERFUL BY AN ORDER OF THOUSANDS. NO JOKE.

I'M SURE YOU'RE SKEPTICAL--I WAS. THERE'S ALWAYS SOMETHING POWERFUL ENOUGH TO COME AND BUST IT UP, RIGHT? MUST BE. EXCEPT NO.

SEE, THE SHIELD ITSELF ACTS AS A CONDUCTOR--WHATEVER ENERGY YOU POUR INTO IT, IT CHANNELS AND REDISTRIBUTES--FIRING OFF THE EXCESS BACK INTO SPACE AND TAKING THE STUFF IT CAN USE AND REPURPOSING IT--

--MEANING YES, THE MORE YOU THROW AT THIS THING, THE STRONGER IT REALLY DOES GET.

"BUT, MARIA," YOU'RE SAYING--"A LOT OF THESE ALIEN RACES--THEY GOT THOSE TELEPORTER THINGS. WHAT IF THEY STOP JUST OUTSIDE THE SHIELD AND THEN 'PORT THEIR WAY IN?" WELL, DON'T WORRY, THERE'S AN APP FOR THAT.

FROM THE ATMOSPHERE, THE SHIELD PERMEATES EVERYTHING BELOW IT WITH GRAY MATTER PARTICLES THAT ARE NANOWIRED TO INTERCEPT ANY UNAUTHORIZED PORTAL OPENINGS WITHIN THE BARRIER LIMITS.

WHICH MEANS--YEAH, WE'RE NOT JUST SHUTTING DOWN ALIENS, BUT ALSO TELEPORTERS HERE ON EARTH. A LOTTA PEOPLE ARE GONNA BE BOOKING ECONOMY SEATS FROM NOW ON INSTEAD.

OF COURSE, THERE ARE DETAILS TO WORK OUT. PROTOCOLS, PERMISSIONS, ACTUALLY ***BUILDING*** THE DAMN THING, BUT--

--BOTTOM LINE, ONCE THIS THING GOES OPERATIONAL, NOTHING IS TRAVELING TO OR FROM THE EARTH WITHOUT S.H.I.E.L.D.'S EXPRESS WRITTEN PERMISSION. I'M TALKING ABOUT A REVOLUTION IN HOW WE GO ABOUT SAVING THE WORLD.

WHICH MEANS ALL OF YOU HAVE A CHOICE TO MAKE.

YOU CAN TEACH ME SOME KIND OF LESSON I WILL NEVER LEARN. THEN YOU CAN PUT SOMEONE ***NEW*** IN CHARGE, SOMEONE WHO DOESN'T KNOW HOW TO DO THE JOB.

AND WHILE SHE'S FIGURING OUT WHICH HELICARRIER MESS HALLS HAVE THE BEST MIMOSA BRUNCHES, ***HYDRA*** WILL ***GROW,*** THE ***CHITAURI*** WILL ***INVADE*** AND GOD-KNOWS-WHAT-ELSE WILL REAR ITS UGLY HEAD.

OR...

...WE COULD PUT ALL THIS UGLINESS BEHIND US, AND TOGETHER, MAKE THIS PLANET MORE SECURE THAN IT'S EVER BEEN BEFORE.

RIGHT NOW, PEOPLE LOOK UP AT THE SKY EVERY DAY AND THEY FEEL ***FEAR***--THEY WONDER WHAT'S GOING TO SHOW UP AND TRY TO KILL THEM NEXT. WE CAN ***CHANGE*** ALL THAT. WE CAN MAKE IT SO THEY FEEL ***HOPE***--

--WE CAN MAKE IT SO THEY FEEL ***SAFE.***

AND NOT FOR NOTHING, BUT MANY OF YOU REPRESENT THE GOVERNMENTS OF NATIONS WHOSE VOTERS HAVE MADE IT ***VERY CLEAR*** THEY WANT TO SEE MUCH STRONGER ACTION IN TERMS OF POLICING OUR INTERGALACTIC BORDER.

I WONDER HOW THEY'D RESPOND IF WORD LEAKED OUT THAT YOU LET THIS OPPORTUNITY SLIP BY YOU BECAUSE YOU THINK I WAS TOO MEAN TO THE SUPER VILLAINS ONCE OR TWICE.

BUT HEY--DON'T THINK OF THAT AS A ***THREAT.*** THINK OF THIS AS YOUR ***OPPORTUNITY*** TO GET YOUR FACE ON YOUR FAVORITE LOCAL CURRENCY.

YOU CAN BE THE PEOPLE THAT STOOD UP AND SAID, "NO MORE ALIENS." YOU CAN BE HEROES, JUST FOR ONE DAY--

--AND ALL I ASK IN RETURN IS A SIMPLE "THANK YOU."

OKAY. OKAY--WHAT THE HELL JUST HAPPENED IN THERE?!

THAT WASN'T A CLOSING STATEMENT--THAT WAS A ***BRIBE.***

AND ***BLACKMAIL.*** WHICH IS WHY IT'LL PROBABLY ***WORK.***

DO WE HAVE A VOTE COUNT?

WAY AHEAD OF YOU. WE CAN PROBABLY DEPEND ON THE DEVELOPING NATIONS--THEY SEE INTERGALACTIC TRADE AS A FUTURE POSSIBILITY. BUT THE U.S. AND THE UK, RIGHT NOW?

AND THEY DOMINATE THE COUNCIL--

SO--A COUNT?

CLOSE. VERY, VERY CLOSE--

"THIS WILL PROBABLY COME DOWN TO ONE VOTE."

KIND OF YOU TO DROP BY, CAPTAIN-- AND AGAIN, THANK YOU FOR THE FINE WORK YOU AND UNION JACK DID HERE--

DON'T MENTION IT, MINISTER DALTON. WITH THIS TRIBUNAL GOING ON, I'M SURE GETTING SOMETHING LIKE THIS OFF YOUR PLATE HELPS--

--YOU DO HAVE AN IMPORTANT DECISION TO MAKE, AFTER ALL.

ER, YES-- AND DON'T THINK YOUR TESTIMONY ISN'T WEIGHING HEAVILY ON MY MIND, CAPTAIN. BUT THIS PLANETARY PROPOSAL, AND WHAT IT WOULD MEAN--FOR ALL OF US--

AH, WELL-- IT DOESN'T MATTER. REGARDLESS OF HOW THIS ALL SHAKES OUT, I'M SURE WE CAN LOOK FORWARD TO MANY YEARS OF WORKING TOGETHER-- AND CAN MAKE SURE THE BOOK OF SINS NEVER FALLS INTO THE WRONG HANDS AGAIN.

OF COURSE.

BUT YOU NEVER CARED ABOUT THE BOOK, DID YOU?

EHH... SORRY?

THE CULT OF THE DARKHOLD HAD ONLY RECENTLY SET UP CAMP IN SCOTLAND. I THOUGHT IT WAS A STRANGE CHOICE ON THEIR PART--I UNDERSTAND THEY HAVE A LOT OF HISTORY THERE, BUT EVEN STILL--THEY HAD TO KNOW THE RISKS.

"TURNS OUT THEY'D BEEN SUMMONED THERE BY ONE OF THE BEINGS THEY WORSHIPED-- A BEING THAT HAD RECENTLY BEEN FREED FROM AN UNDERGROUND PRISON HE'D BEEN CONFINED TO SINCE ARTHURIAN DAYS--"

--SO I DECIDED TO LOOK INTO THIS CREATURE. TURNS OUT HE'D BEEN FREED ACCIDENTALLY BY A SCOTTISH FRACKING OPERATION. ONE YOUR GOVERNMENT HAS ITS FINGERPRINTS ALL OVER.

AND YOU-- WELL, YOU HAVE A NUMBER OF ***PERSONAL*** TIES TO THE CONTRACTS AS WELL, MINISTER.

CAPTAIN ROGERS, I-- I CAN ASSURE YOU IT'S NOT SO SIMPLE--

IT WAS A GOOD PLAN, I IMAGINE. LET THE CULT ESTABLISH A FOOTHOLD IN THE AREA, THEN SEND S.H.I.E.L.D. IN TO DEAL WITH IT--AND AFTERWARDS YOU COULD PIN THE CREATURE'S RETURN ON THE CULTISTS. WHO WOULD EVER DOUBT YOU?

TROUBLE FOR YOU IS, I HAVE MORE EXPERTISE IN THIS AREA THAN YOU KNEW.

CAPTAIN, PLEASE-- ***WAIT***--I CAN EXPLAIN!

NO NEED, MINISTER. I'M FULLY AWARE OF THE WAY YOU AND YOUR KIND DO BUSINESS--

--IT'S ***THEM*** YOU NEED TO CONVINCE.

ALL RISE-- THIS COUNCIL IS NOW BACK IN SESSION.

IT'S OBVIOUSLY BEEN A VERY DIFFICULT AND TRYING TWENTY-FOUR HOURS FOR ALL OF US--

--AND WE CERTAINLY MOURN THE LOSS OF OUR COLLEAGUE AND FRIEND, ***MINISTER DALTON.***

HIS DEATH IS A REMINDER TO US ALL THAT IN THE FIGHT AGAINST EXTREMIST TERROR, WE MUST ALWAYS REMAIN VIGILANT.

DALTON

THAT SAID-- THIS COUNCIL IS DETERMINED TO HONOR THE MINISTER'S LEGACY THE ONLY WAY WE KNOW HOW--BY CONTINUING TO DO THE WORK THAT MEANT SO MUCH TO HIM.

WE STILL HAVE ENOUGH VOTES FOR A QUORUM, AND THIS TRIBUNAL IS SIMPLY TOO ***IMPORTANT*** TO BE PLACED ON HOLD.

SO, DIRECTOR HILL, WITH THAT IN MIND--AFTER SOME DELIBERATION, THIS COUNCIL HAS REACHED A DECISION...

1940.

YOU WANTED TO SEE ME, SIR?

YES, COME IN, STEVEN.

DO YOU KNOW WHY YOU'RE HERE?

IF THIS IS ABOUT MY PERFORMANCE TODAY, I CAN DO BETTER--I JUST NEED MORE ***PRACTICE.*** I CAN RUN MY OWN DRILLS OVER THE WEEKEND--

I THINK WE'VE ALL SEEN ENOUGH OF YOU ON THAT COURSE TO LAST A LIFETIME, YOUNG MAN.

THEN--WHY...?

WE HAVE A MISSION FOR YOU, STEVE.

A ***MISSION?*** YOU MEAN--

IN THE ***FIELD,*** THAT'S RIGHT. IN FACT--YOU'LL BE RETURNING TO YOUR ***HOMELAND,*** THE UNITED STATES--

HOME? REALLY?

IS THAT GOING TO BE A PROBLEM?

N-NO, I JUST NEVER THOUGHT--

LISTEN TO ME, STEVEN--THIS WILL BE CHALLENGING FOR YOU IN MANY WAYS. BUT YOU NEED TO KNOW--IT'S VITAL TO THE GLORY OF HYDRA.

IN FACT, I BELIEVE IT MAY END UP BEING THE SINGLE MOST IMPORTANT MISSION WE UNDERTAKE IN THIS WAR. SO MUCH IS DEPENDING ON THIS. I NEED TO KNOW WE CAN COUNT ON YOU.

I--I WON'T LET YOU DOWN, SIR.

PROJECT: REBIRTH

GOOD. YOU'LL NEED TO START READING UP, THEN. THIS FILE HAS ALL THE INFORMATION YOU'LL NEED ON THE OPERATION--MEMORIZE EVERY WORD OF IT, BEGINNING WITH THE NAME OF YOUR TARGET...

"...DOCTOR ABRAHAM ERSKINE."

NEXT

THE STORY EXPANDS IN

THUNDERBOLTS #8

UNCANNY AVENGERS #18

ZONE